

## Loving The Powerless

*“Celebration Publications” offers this reflection for The Feast of Christ the King,  
Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, November 26, 2017*

*By Pat Marrin*

Dear Lectors,

The Solemnity of Christ the King concludes the liturgical year with the assertion that, despite the ominous end-of-time imagery featured in the preceding weeks, God is the ultimate power in the universe.

But what does God’s power look like? If Jesus represents God’s kingship, then divine power is both mysterious and paradoxical. Earthly power is the capacity to force others by threat or violence to do what you want. Kings are the image of power, dominating their subjects and their adversaries.

The title of “king” applied to Jesus is ironic in that, throughout his earthly life, he never claimed political or physical power other than the power of words. He was a preacher, teacher, storyteller. He sought out powerless people, often the victims of power — the poor, sick and social outcasts. In his confrontation with the power structures of his own time, he did not resist, but surrendered himself to violent abuse and an unjust death. The evangelists depict his death as a kind of parody of kingship. Jesus is cloaked in purple, crowned with thorns, enthroned on a cross between two thieves, mocked as the “King of the Jews.” His crucifixion is a sign of contradiction that turns upside down any notion of power and control.

It is a fact of history that the emerging institutional church found two of Jesus’ radical witnesses — pacifism and voluntary poverty — too difficult to sustain in practical terms. By the third century, the official church was on its way to becoming one of the wealthiest and most dominant powers in the West.

Spiritualizing Jesus as a king is one way to distinguish his power from earthly power. But we should not miss the witness of his life as

radically poor and powerless as his way of revealing that God shares these characteristics. As absolute Love, God does not force the divine will. God does not threaten transgressors to get them to obey. God does not withhold forgiveness to shame sinners. God does not prevent us from making mistakes or hold our failures over us when we seek to repent.

The power Jesus practiced was self-emptying love and unlimited mercy. He mirrored perfectly his *Abba* in this, for God is the source of unconditional love, a never-ending offering of divine life to sinners. This is God’s very nature, and God has no other name than Mercy.

What does this love and mercy look like in Jesus’ disciples in today’s world? Today’s readings offers two views. First, in Ezekiel, God is presented as a compassionate shepherd. Jesus found this image a perfect description of God. Shepherds were, in fact, the lowliest of peasants, hired to wander with the flocks in search of pasture. Jesus’ parable of the good shepherd is less about power than vulnerability and extravagant love. His shepherd leaves the whole flock to find a single lost sheep. His shepherd will offer his life for the sheep. What sensible person would do either?

In Matthew, Jesus tells us where to find him. The Lord of the Universe has disappeared among the hungry, thirsty, naked, lost, sick, imprisoned, alien and persecuted of this world. Our King is hiding in the least of our brothers and sisters. The one power he exhibits is to move our hearts to compassion. His very poverty invites us to exercise the power we share with God as his image and likeness — the power to love. This is the essence of our royal priesthood, the power to sacrifice ourselves for others. This is how we honor and imitate our King.



### **Some More Information:**

- There is a **Family Mass** scheduled in November, **one** in January and **one** in February. These Masses will be celebrated at 10am and children will Proclaim the Word.
- On the 1st Sunday of Advent, December 3, 2017, the New Liturgical Year begins with the Cycle “B” readings, Mark’s Gospel. **Your New Lector Workbooks are ready to be picked up in the Church Office.**
- **This year the 4th Sunday of Advent is also Christmas Eve, December 24th.** Because of this shortened liturgical season, we will not have a lector practice for Advent. We will have one during Lent.
- There will be a sign-up sheet for the 9:00am Mass on November 23rd, Thanksgiving Day.
- **Linda McKeague** and our multiple choirs and musicians will host their **Music Gala on Sunday December 10th**. Our Parish **Advent Reconciliation is December 17, 2017** at 7:00pm in the Church.
- We will continue to have a sign-up for the readings at the Christmas Masses! Christmas Eve is Sunday, December 24th and Christmas Day is Monday, December 25th. The Feast of the Holy Family will be on Saturday, December 30th, and Sunday, December 31st. There will **not be a 5pm Mass** on Sunday, New Years Eve. Monday, January 1st will be the Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God, and morning Mass will be at 10am.

### **THE MEANING**

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel!” Our sanctuaries and our homes ring with these ancient words of invitation and welcome as we embrace the season of Advent. Quieting ourselves, much as the coming of winter stills and quiets the natural world, we seek to prepare a place for Christ to come again and to be born anew—for his coming or “advent”—in our hearts and in our world. We remember his entry into human life as a vulnerable newborn, and remembering the Paschal Mystery, we also affirm when he will return in glory at the Parousia, the fulfillment of salvation history.

The coming of the Messiah was a source of hope and anticipation in the life of the people of Israel. Frequently subjugated and often enslaved, they looked to the coming of the savior of the Jewish people as a horizon of promise. In these weeks of Advent we hear many stories of the covenant that God has entered into with his chosen people.

We also hear of the expansion of God’s call the entire human family through his Son, Jesus Christ. We

believe that the Messiah sent to save Israel is, in fact, the Savior of all people. All are called to come to God’s holy mountain.

The invitation is not passive. We hear the voice of John the Baptist crying out from the wilderness, inviting all who would seek repentance to the waters of baptism. John does not sit silently, hoping that people will somehow find him, however much that might be to their benefit. His invitation to us is active. Similarly, Jesus reminds us to “be alert” for the signs that redemption is at hand. The story of the Virgin Mary, who trusted and said yes to bearing God into human form, reminds us that when we hear God calling, our response should be trust and affirmation.

It is ironic that in our age, what should be a season of stillness, listening, and waiting becomes a season of frenetic busyness. In the bustle of “making” Christmas—decorating, buying gifts, preparing food, and entertaining—we can find ourselves exhausted and depleted. This can be true in our parishes as well as in our homes, where seasonal programs and special liturgies increase staff and volunteer workload. With the focus on the expectations of community members for certain types of Advent experiences, we can lose track of the richness of this season for evangelization and welcome.

Because we have others tasks demanding our attention, we may presume that if someone is new to town, they’ll find the local Catholic church in the phone book or on the Web. In our focus on our current community relationships, we may miss the challenge newcomers face as they try to make connections in this season, particularly if they are far away from friends and family. We have to actively remember that for the grieving, the lonely, the unemployed—for people struggling in any way—Christmas Time can be one of stress, not joy. They, too, need ways to meaningfully connect.

Advent is an ideal time to encourage community members to reach out and include people in the life of our parishes. This can be challenging for Catholics. While members may know people who are rooted in the Catholic tradition they may feel hesitant to invite them to join us at Mass, afraid that they’ll be perceived as pushy or, even worse, holy rollers. We need to actively help people remember that we are inviting people to experience something wonderful and extraordinary when we bring them to the Eucharist: a relationship with a God so intimate that he chose to become one with the human family by taking on human form.”(2018 Sourcebook)

Thank you once again for your dedication to the ministry of Proclaiming the Word.

Claudia Nolan